

# The Cigarette

By William Dent Pitman

Author of "The Quincey Case"

"THERE is only one thing I do not understand, and do not like, about the billet," declared Banning emphatically, "and that is the record."

"You mean the tale of my predecessors?" asked Grendon, the elder man, "yes—it is rather a coincidence."

"A coincidence?" Jack Banning sat up, with a movement full of nervous energy peculiar to him, "Surely it is more than that! Why, look here, man—" he searched among the typewritten sheets on the table near at hand, and selected one, "read this! 'You are to succeed Prof. Christy Jarvis, who three months ago, in a sudden attack of madness, killed a Mexican attendant, and has since died himself in the hospital.' Jarvis had followed on the recall of Palen, 'whose health,' Banning read again, 'was so unfavorable as to cause him accessions of delirium, in which he endangered the life of his companions—!' Palen, you observe, however, has recovered since his return home."

"I knew all that," was Grendon's comment, "but—"

"But! Isn't it rather a big 'but'?" Banning interrupted, "and when we go still further back—now let's look. Jarvis is dead, Palen on duty at Copan for five months, left there in 1905. His predecessor, Langton Eustace, had started the expedition in 1903, and after two years, cut his own throat in a fit of mania! Three men in four years; I never heard anything like it!"

"Oh, it's nothing but coincidence," Grendon asserted easily. "I know that part of Honduras and so do you, Banning. It's not healthy exactly—but it doesn't kill, if one is careful. I don't believe these fellows were, that's all. Why, there's the chap in charge of the expedition now, Norquoy, he went down with Eustace originally, and has stayed right through since 1903, with only two short holidays. Nothing has happened to him, you see."

"Norquoy? I don't seem to know the name," said Banning.

"Tony Norquoy, Antonio, I believe," Grendon explained. "His mother was a Mexican, though his father is English. He writes me his health has been excellent. Come now, what do you say? There isn't a chap I'd rather have than you, Banning, for aide and secretary. You know the country, and you're a good photographer. The pay is fair—and the glory will be considerable, if we have any kind of luck with those ruins."

"I know, and yet—" Banning hesitated, "Eustace goes crazy and kills himself; Palen, delirious—endangers the lives of his companions; Jarvis kills a fellow, and dies insane. Doesn't that make you creep—a bit?"

"Not a creep—and Norquoy?"

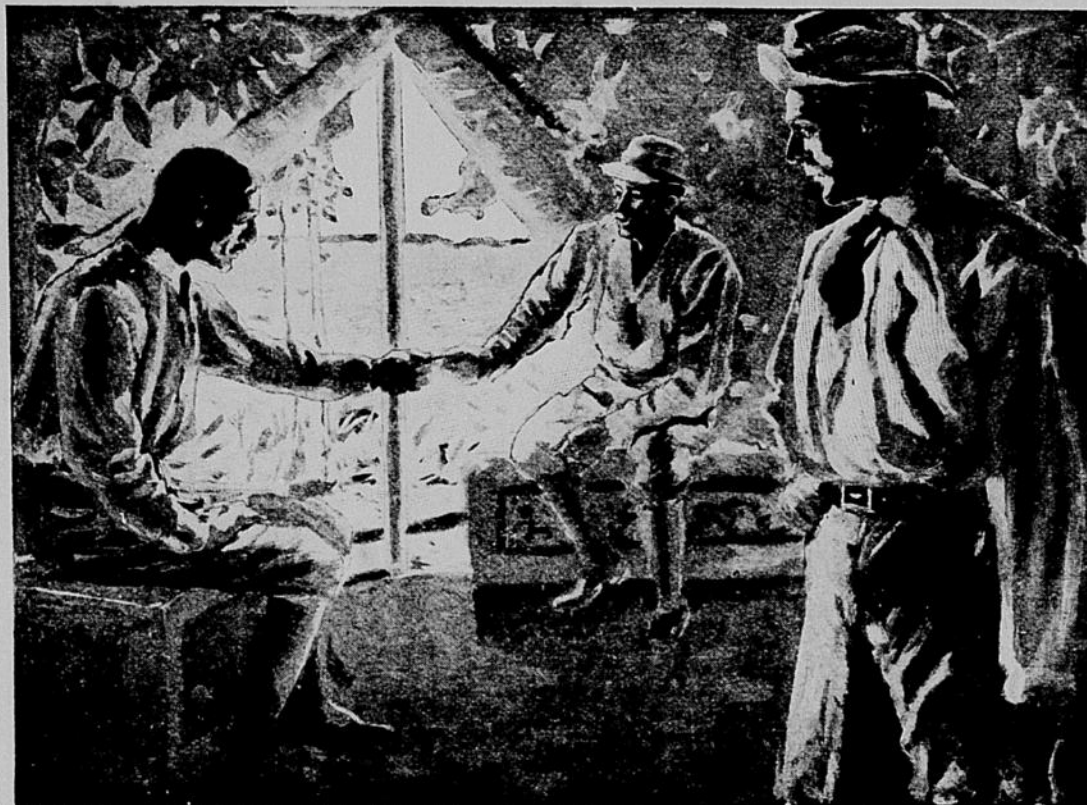
"I've not made up my mind about Norquoy."

"Oh come now, Jack! Don't be absurd!" and Grendon sat up to laugh his jovial peal. "Do I look like mania? Come along—unless you've something better to do."

"You know I haven't, and of course I'll come," said Banning, at last, resignedly, "but mark my words—we'll have to keep a sharp lookout."

"Sit up all night and look out if you want to, old man," said Grendon, good humoredly; and plunged at once into a discussion of stores and equipment. For him, the sinister fate of his predecessors in the Copan Excavation Expedition dropped out of mind as if it had not been.

WITH Jack Banning this was not the case. A younger man, perhaps more highly strung, the facts remained in his mind, though they came but seldom from his lips. He chose his pistols, his rifle, for instance, with that black thought always in the back of his consciousness. Otherwise he was efficiency, energy itself, full of interest in the plan, and of loyalty to his chief. It was due in no small measure to his efforts that they landed promptly at Port Yzabal, and after several days' toilsome journey by rude mountain tracks, came out late in the afternoon upon a cliff overlooking their goal.



"Try one of my cigarettes," said Norquoy.

Copan, the famous ruined city of the Mayas, that mysterious people of Central America, lay in a lovely valley beneath Banning, as he drew rein. The mountains they had just passed through raised craggy heads behind the little group. The Copan River wound along below, dividing into halves the immense, low heaps and mounds of stone and earth which once had been houses and buildings. On the right bank a huge, vague mass of terrace and plateau showed the famous temples, with stairways reaching up to them. Cedars and ceibas grew among the blocks of stonework, forcing them apart. The characteristic of this ruin, which at once struck the eye of Grendon and his assistant, was its incoherence. Not as in Egypt a central group of ruins, here was a great, scattered pile, spreading out by the river bank what must have been innumerable temples and other edifices. Just under them, now half a mile away, a little bunch of huts, and white, gleaming tents showed the camp of the expedition to the newcomers. And as they looked, a figure somewhat taller than the others grouped about the tents, came out and stood gazing up at the opaque, tropical sky.

"That's Norquoy," said Grendon to his assistant, and Banning stared with interest at the man who had outstayed his ill-starred chiefs.

HALF an hour later when they were all laughing and talking in the camp together, he was inclined to believe that Norquoy might outstay anybody anywhere. Tall, lean and wiry, he had not an ounce of spare flesh on his bones, and was as gnarled and brown as a twisted cedar tree. His eyes were black, but even under the sun of Honduras there were tokens that his coloring had verged originally on the blond. For the rest he was affability itself; courteously respectful to Grendon as his new chief, cordial and friendly to Banning. All the while he chatted he rolled and smoked innumerable tiny cigarettes, and Banning was conscious that his penetrating eye studied them both.

"Yes, you're just in time, Dr. Grendon," he was saying, "we had to stop work on the Jaguar stairway when Jarvis went off the hook, and the stelae there are fine, very fine. There's plenty of work for a good photographer."

"Banning's camera is excellent," said Grendon, interested, feeling in his pockets all the while. "Bother, it looks as if I was out of tobacco."

"Try one of my cigarettes," said Norquoy, promptly, proffering one which his chief as promptly accepted. "It's Mexican tobacco, but not at all bad."

"Very good, on the contrary," said Grendon, after the first puff or two, and the talk flowed about the work; while the assistant, who was no smoker, sat by on a case of tinned beef and listened with interest.

Norquoy had not wasted time during the interregnum, it was evident; and indeed during the next week Banning had many times to acknowledge his ability. The gang of Mexicans and half-breeds

obeyed him implicitly. His work on the Jaguar stairway, one of the richest sections of the ruins, had been steadily carried ahead; so that the assistant was kept busy for the first fortnight in obtaining negatives of the magnificent bits of carving and monoliths Norquoy had unearthed. And yet, he puzzled Banning. There were moments when his eyes shone with scornful gleams, almost of laughter; and when his observation of his companions carried in it a something of mockery. But there was little time after all to speculate about Norquoy. The work on the stairway was organized and vigorously pushed; and Grendon, with his energy and his learning, saw rich material in view to occupy both.

One day nearly a month after their arrival, Jack Banning came out of the tent he used as a photographic dark-room, and met Norquoy running toward it with an anxious face. Behind him, a group of Mexicans moved more slowly, with Grendon, looking in a very bad way, in their midst.

"What's up?" Banning asked.

"Oh, nothing—" panted the other, making light, "only the chief, he has a touch of sun, I guess. Sort of delirious and wanted to axe one of the boys. He better lie down awhile."

"You don't mean it!" cried the other, hastening forward and feeling as if an icy hand had touched him.

"He's off his head, anyhow," declared Norquoy significantly, and Banning soon saw he was not mistaken. The elder man, dizzy, muttering, and at times raving, was put to bed in his tent, and all night Banning watched beside him.

Of course, it was overwork and sun, so he repeated to himself, as he listened to the wildly delirious cries and visions of the sick man. After awhile the opiates Banning gave, took effect, and Grendon seemed to quiet into sleep. His friend, however, still sat awake thinking. Was it sun? And if not, what was it? He knew Grendon to be an absolutely sober man, familiar with the climate, and acquainted with the dangers added to it by alcohol. Also, he was a man in good physical condition. Under his direction and Norquoy's care, the camp was as nearly hygienic as it was possible to keep it, and this was not the season of the year for the swamp fever. What was this mysterious attack, and was it true, as one of the Indian carriers had told Banning, that the gods of the Mayas were indignant at the desecration of their temples, and would smite the desecrator with madness? Why should the heads of the expedition in succession be the ones afflicted? Soberly puzzled, troubled and suspicious, Banning went to the door of the tent to breathe the fresh air. It was long after midnight and very still. Suddenly, and noiselessly, he saw the flap of Norquoy's tent open, and the tall figure of its owner seemed to glide out of the crack and disappear into the night. Banning listened and watched, but no sound rewarded him. There was no reason why Norquoy should not go out if he chose, and yet, Banning said nothing at all about it to him the next morning.

WHATEVER had been the cause of Grendon's attack it had practically passed off with the dawn. He was shaky, and complained of headache, but pooh-poohed Banning's anxiety. He had a touch of fever, he said, and would be more careful in the future, and he kept his word. A fortnight and some days went peacefully by, and in the excitement and the hard work Jack Banning had little time to worry over the occurrence. He returned to his tent one evening to find his chief there before him. Grendon spoke of slight headache and dizziness, and beside him on the ground Banning saw his medicine case of simple remedies. "I'd lie down, sir," he suggested, but the chief shook his head.

"Oh, I'm not sick," he declared irritably. "I'll sit here and smoke awhile before going to bed."

Banning turned to his diary and was soon absorbed. The acrid smoke of Grendon's cigarettes



was in the air, and he smelled it with dislike. Something—he never knew what, caused him to turn his head; and there with the light of furious madness in his eyes, was Grendon creeping toward him, knife in hand! More than once had Banning's quickness saved his life, and it saved him now. An instant's pause and it would have been all over. His rifle was leaning against the tent, he caught it and before the maniac could rise to his feet, Banning brought the butt down on his head. Grendon fell forward, the knife jumped to the corner of the tent and stuck in the turf, quivering.

The actions of Banning were all based hereafter on a sudden and intense suspicion. The whole incident had passed without enough noise to alarm the camp, and Banning did not intend to alarm it. After he had bound the lunatic to his cot, and given him a powerful opiate, he took the precaution to gag him well. The blow had only stunned and not in any way hurt Grendon, and his assistant carefully bathed the bruise. Then he took the medicine chest on his knees and scrutinized it; the bottle out of which Grendon had taken a dose contained only aromatic ammonia. But Banning was not satisfied; he examined everything even to Grendon's half-smoked cigarette, which lay where it had fallen. With shaking fingers he tore it open, examined, smelt it—and his face suddenly grew set.

"That is Mariahuana!" he murmured; and fell upon the bunch of unsmoked cigarettes. About half of the bunch were made up with leaves of the mariahuana plant rolled in with the tobacco. Now, Jack Banning chanced to know all about the poisonous mariahuana weed, which grows wild in southern Mexico. It greatly resembles tobacco, but it is so powerful and dangerous an intoxicant that its sale has had to be prohibited. The mariahuana smoker becomes first dizzy, then delirious, and finally homicidal. Grendon's attack was fully explained, but to what did the explanation point? Some one had given him poison unawares; and that same one must have given mariahuana also to his three predecessors!

"Norquoy!" muttered Banning and sat up. He must ferret out this vile business to the bottom before he took any action. What motive had Norquoy for such an evil deed? Unless in truth he was after something which he wishes to pursue alone, and unobserved—? Banning remembered seeing him steal secretly from his tent, and he resolved to watch. He placed himself at the door of the tent, for Grendon still slept, the heavy opium sleep—and waited.

IT was late, a still, hot, tropical night. A thin moon swung overhead with the splendid millions of stars. Luck was with Banning; he had not long to watch before the flap of the other tent noiselessly opened, and Norquoy came out. He stood there a lean, alert figure, listening, looking carefully this way and that. Then with cat-like steps he moved away from the camp and down towards the river. Banning followed, keeping well behind and in the shadows. Norquoy took the left river-bank until he reached a point exactly opposite the larger heap of ruins. It was on the other side of this heap that the expedition was at work upon the Jaguar stairway; and this part had been untouched, save by the Copan river, whose waters, flowing swiftly against the ruined pile, had laid bare its tiers and floors in numberless holes and openings.

Norquoy got into a little boat which was tethered to the bank, and Banning, from the shadow of the celbas, saw his tall shape bending over the oars. Fortunately, the moonlight gave a certain light, enough to see the opposite bank of the river at this narrow point. Banning was just able to see where Norquoy landed; then came a tiny flash of light over the water, soon quenched in one of the dark openings. It was the seventh hole from a certain heap of rock; the watcher counted it many times till he was sure. Norquoy was absent about half an hour. Then came again the flash of light at the seventh hole; and the oarsman rowing steadily back over the stream. He alighted, made fast his boat, and turned quietly, but with the step of a man satisfied, back to the camp.

Jack Banning let him go. He had hardly disappeared before Banning was at the water side and in the boat. Ten minutes more and its keel grounded on the friable, rocky shelf of the ruined pile. Then Banning hunted for the seventh hole, and found it, rather horrified to discover that it

was a shallow opening scarcely admitting a man's body. But, if he had wished for conviction, he had it in the still warm lantern and the match-box, tucked into a dry corner of the rock. Light in hand, Banning wriggled in. The opening not more than five feet by two at the mouth, widened



Something—he never knew what—caused him to turn his head.

rapidly into a low passage-way, where one could crawl on hands and knees. A few hundred yards further on, it made a sharp turn to the left; and here, Banning, holding his lantern, saw that a breach had recently been made in a wall of old masonry which had blocked this point. The traces were those of a single worker, and his task must have been slow and difficult. But Banning could not pause tonight; he promised himself to return for a full examination later. Slipping through the breach, he found himself in an ancient rock passage bearing signs of Maya workmanship. It was high enough and wide enough for two men to walk abreast and at full height; and it led directly into what Banning knew must be the very heart of the temple ruins. The way seemed long. Frequently, walls of masonry interposed, evidently to cut off this passage; and through them, Norquoy evidently, still alone, had patiently mined his way. It must have taken months of work, even when his plots had removed his superiors, and so given him uninterrupted opportunities. Banning was beginning to fear he must turn back, when a flight of low stone steps showed itself leading down into the earth. He hurried down them and in a few moments found himself standing in the broken doorway of a small square chamber.

AND then Banning understood. For here, below the earth, Norquoy had come upon an ancient store-house of the Mayas, filled with their treasures. Not treasures in the commercial sense, for there was no hoard of gold, but few jewels, but the almost equally valuable belongings of an extinct civilization. Carvings, potteries, masks, gods and stelae, wooden images and articles of household use, feather robes still brilliant in that dry air, headdresses, furniture and Maya books in brilliant hieroglyphs—it presented an amazingly rich discovery, and no wonder, perhaps, Norquoy had wished to keep it to himself.

But, tempted as he was, Banning had no time to examine these marvels. Hurriedly he retraced his steps and came out on the river bank, just as the first dawn gleams showed the distant mountain view. With infinite precautions he rowed across, re-tied the boat, and returned to camp. He found Grendon sleeping quietly; and himself slipped into bed for an hour's rest. He took it readily because his mind was made up.

Grendon awoke with all the heaviness of a man

drugged; yet, quite himself, and wholly unconscious of the attack on his secretary. He took his own temperature, swallowed his soup and quinine, declared himself to be in for a day's fever and decided as he phrased it, "to give up the day to it." When he asked for his tobacco, Banning

was careful to see that he got none of Norquoy's special brand of cigarettes. And while that astute person was off in the chief's place, Banning slipped across to his tent and supplied his tobacco jar with a liberal portion of mariahuana. Then he awaited developments.

These were indeed swifter than he could have hoped. He saw Norquoy's Mexican boy come back, hot-foot, for more tobacco; and he smiled grimly to himself as he remembered the other's incessant smoking. Vengeance, he felt, was peculiarly apt and fit, and he need do nothing but wait.

Towards five o'clock a hideous uproar was heard in camp; and Banning, pistol in hand, joined his chief at the tent door. In an instant more Vasquez, Norquoy's boy, staggered up, his head bleeding from a bad cut.

"Chief gone mad—he kill!" was all he could gasp out, before he fell down in a faint.

It took the whole camp twenty minutes battle with the mad man before they got him down. Norquoy had imbibed an unusually heavy dose of the mariahuana, and he was an unusually powerful man. In his delirium he imagined that he fought with wild beasts, and his cries resembled theirs. But after a long struggle they got him tied and gagged, and Banning, setting astride of his chest, pressed home the hypodermic needle. He was only an amateur doctor, he told Grendon, but he knew what was good for Norquoy, and he would take the responsibility. But Banning had a harder task when it came to his second plan, and of this too, he took the responsibility. For while his chief slept, the deep sleep of convalescence, as from a bout of fever, Banning got ready a cart and mule, and a couple of wondering Mexicans. They put Norquoy, still utterly unconscious, into the cart; which was

piled with his belongings, and Banning added a curt little note of explanation. The sun was up when he returned to camp, having seen the convoy well started on the road to Port Yzabal.

"AND you mean to say that chap drugged me and I acted like that?" gasped the chief, when he woke and heard it all.

"I should say you did, sir. It was his little way of getting the field to himself," replied Banning, "and, indeed, I don't know a cleverer. You see, he got on the track of some stuff, and I expect Langton Eustace was in his way. So that put it into his mind, and after Eustace cut his throat—"

"Good God!" said Grendon, "so he did!"

"Oh, that's nothing for a mariahuana!" declared Banning, "Well, you see that gave Norquoy time, and so he tried it on again, with brilliant success in the cases of Palen and Christy Jarvis. But, in your case, sir, he was a little too impatient, he hurried it too much."

"My dear boy," said Grendon, "and—you say he did find something?"

"He certainly did, and I'll show it to you," cried Jack Banning with delight, "we'll have a fine showing in our next report, sir, of the Copan Excavation Expedition. And we'll be fair, for though you may be sure he never meant the Expedition to profit by it, we'll put Norquoy's name in the report!"

### THE WAY OF DESTINY.

Lead me, O, Zeus, and thou, Destiny, whithersoever ye have appointed me to go, and may I follow fearlessly.—  
—Epictetus.

Over the grassy paths I wander, far  
O'er hill-crest and in intimate hollows; on  
Where dewy boughs swing arched above my head;  
And where the great-eyed, wistful violets are,  
And where the redbud blushes to the dawn,  
Hast thou, O, Destiny, my footsteps, led.

Whether the Way lies o'er the desert plains,  
Or where bright fields lie golden in the sun,  
Grant me a heart of courage, Destiny;  
That if no single violet remains  
To take from that sweet path, I may not shun  
The Way, but follow, follow fearlessly.

Clark Barr.